

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 18, 2005

WETLANDS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

File No. 05-030

Project Manager: Kate Goodnight

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$125,000 to the Watsonville Wetlands Watch for the construction of the Wetlands Educational Resource Center at the Pajaro Valley High School near the Watsonville Slough System.

LOCATION: City of Watsonville, Santa Cruz County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access and Education

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Maps

Exhibit 2: Memorandum of Agreement for the Wetlands Education and Resource Center Between the City of Watsonville, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and the Watsonville Wetlands Watch

Exhibit 3: Revised EIR and Supplemental EIR (*Separate CD enclosed*)

Exhibit 4: Final Adopted Staff Report for City of Watsonville Local Coastal Program Major Amendment Number 1-99

Exhibit 5: Watsonville City Council Resolution Granting LCP Permit for WERC

Exhibit 6: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31409 and 31119(a)(1) of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$125,000) to the Watsonville Wetlands Watch to be used for the construction of the Wetlands Educational Resource Center at the Pajaro Valley High School, in Santa Cruz County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for construction, the Watsonville Wetlands Watch shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A work program, including the project schedule and budget, and the names of any contractors and/or subcontractors to be employed on the project;
 - b. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to implement the project have been obtained; and
 - c. Evidence of compliance with the relevant Conservancy standards and recommendations for accessway location and development.
2. The resource center built under this authorization shall be managed and operated in a manner consistent with Memorandum of Agreement for the Wetlands Education and Resource Center (Exhibit 2) and Public Resources Code Section 31116(a).
3. The grantee shall ensure that the Pajaro Valley Unified School District shall implement, or shall cause to be implemented, the mitigation measures contained in the SEIR dated June 2001 (Exhibit 3)."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Sections 31400-31409 and 31119(a)(1) of the Public Resources Code regarding public coastal access and will serve greater than local needs.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Watsonville Wetlands Watch is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
4. The Conservancy has (1) independently reviewed and considered the project's record, the Coastal Commission's LCP amendment approval (Exhibit 4), the Revised Environmental Impact Report (Exhibit 3), the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (*Id.*), the Watsonville City Council Resolution Granting LCP Permit for the WERC (Exhibit 5), and concurs with the Final SEIR prepared and adopted by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District on May 23, 2001 and the LCP amendment approved by the City of Watsonville; (2) finds that the project avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no substantial evidence that the WERC project, as mitigated, may have a significant adverse effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code Regulations Section 15382; and (3) finds that there is substantial evidence based on the administrative record before the Conservancy that the project will not have a potential for adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources as defined in California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2 and 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d)."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Wetlands Educational Resource Center (WERC) will be the first environmental education and docent training center in the Pajaro Valley. It will provide over 4,000 students per year with hands-on opportunities to learn about one of California's last remaining freshwater coastal wetlands. In addition, community members will have a centralized location to research and observe these wetlands. The 2,800 sq. ft. center will consist of a laboratory/classroom, a visitor center and library, a covered outdoor classroom, and a greenhouse for native plant restoration projects. (Exhibit 1).

The WERC will meet three urgent needs. First, it will be the only wetlands education center on the central coast dedicated to studying and preserving endangered freshwater wetlands. Second, because these freshwater wetlands drain into the ocean and are an essential part of ocean ecology, the WERC will fill an educational and research gap between the oceanic studies at the Seymour Center in Santa Cruz and the tidal studies at the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve in Northern Monterey County. Finally, the WERC is ideally located to foster local stewardship, particularly within the Latino community.

Having a Wetlands Educational Resource Center will allow deeper and broader learning through science projects such as long-term monitoring of water quality and participation in ongoing restoration/education research. The facilities at the center will enable at least three times the number of current students to participate in these programs. It will provide a much needed centralized location for environmental education programs sponsored by such groups as MERITO (the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's bilingual environmental education program), the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District.

The laboratory and greenhouse will allow for more advanced training in water quality monitoring techniques and the propagation of native plants to be used in restoration projects. The visitor center will house materials vital to the research at the center, with a library of books and other educational materials concerning the Pajaro Valley wetlands and watershed. In the absence of a visitor center and central library, only a dedicated few have had access to research and investigations about these rich wetlands. Centralizing these widely scattered materials and providing community seminars will help distribute this knowledge and enhance future educational and research projects. A lending library of educational kits and classroom materials supporting the Santa Cruz County watershed activity guide, *Watershed Cruzin'*, funded by the Conservancy and Coastal Commission, will also be available. The center will also provide a much-needed meeting and training space for organizations and watershed councils involved in watershed and wetland restoration.

The WERC is ideally located at the new Pajaro Valley High School currently being constructed between West Struve Slough and Harkins Slough, two of the six freshwater sloughs that comprise the Watsonville Slough System. The indoor classroom will be equipped with computers, microscopes, and other tools and instruments for natural science research projects.

The outdoor classroom will provide a covered shelter for observations and art and language projects. These classrooms will be available for all students in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) as well as students from the surrounding region of northern Santa Cruz County, San Benito County, and Monterey County. The PVUSD is one of the largest school districts in Northern California and is presently serving a K-12 population of approximately 19,000 students. The District is direct-funded for one of the largest migrant education programs in the nation, serving over 5,000 migrant students. The majority of the population in Watsonville is Latino (75%). The schools closest to the WERC are in the lowest socioeconomic zones in the District.

Currently the education/restoration program field trips hosted by the nonprofit Watsonville Wetlands Watch (WWW) enable 600 students a year to experience first-hand observation and restoration of the Watsonville slough system. Students come from San Benito and Monterey Counties as well as from Santa Cruz County to participate in these programs. In addition, the City of Watsonville brings over 1,000 students from Watsonville to the sloughs for environmental field trips. It is anticipated that 2,000 students from multiple school districts will use the center the first year, increasing to 4,000 students per year within five years.

The WWW has been the recognized leader in wetlands education in the Pajaro Valley. The WWW was formed in 1990 to advocate for protection of the wetlands of Watsonville and southern Santa Cruz County. From the start the WWW recognized that an educated community was essential to promote long term stewardship and regularly held wetland walks for the public. In 1999 the WWW became a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization and the next year published a prize winning book, *Watching the Watsonville Wetlands*. Of the 3,000 books printed, over 450 were donated and distributed to the PVUSD as texts for slough-related natural science, art, and writing projects. Since then the WWW has begun its own wetland educational programs. The first two programs were funded by several Whale Tail grants from the California Coastal Commission. Recently the WWW was awarded a three year “B_WET” grant, funded by NOAA for environmental education at the new Pajaro Valley High School.

In addition to launching its own programs, the WWW has collaborated with the City of Watsonville, the PVUSD, and the Resource Conservation District on educational programs. Staff from the PVUSD, the City of Watsonville, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and the MERITO Program of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary have attended the WWW docent program in order to incorporate freshwater wetlands into their programs.

Site Description:

The Wetlands Educational Resource Center will be located at the new Pajaro Valley High school on land dedicated to the WERC by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. It is the only parcel west of Highway 1 which is within the Watsonville city limits, and it is adjacent to public lands and agricultural preserves. The high school is currently under construction.

The site is on the uplands of the West Struve Slough, one of the six branches of the Watsonville slough system. This system in the lowlands of the Pajaro River valley in Santa Cruz County

contains 800 acres of seasonal wetlands, open water marsh, mudflats, brackish marsh, and adjoining wet meadow and seep spring habitats. It serves as an important water filter for the runoff from the urban, industrial and agricultural uses of the 13,000 acre watershed. It is one of the largest freshwater marshlands in the state's coastal zone and includes some of the most important bird habitat in the Monterey Bay area.

This site is adjacent to the 120 acre West Branch of Struve Slough Ecological Reserve, a publicly owned piece of land which is among the most ecologically diverse sections of the slough system. It provides essential nesting, forage, nutrient cycling and prey populations for 249 species of local and migrating land and water birds, including 27 of the 73 declining bird species listed in California as species of special concern. The freshwater marshland provides integral habitat for the federally listed as threatened red-legged frog along with a number of additional mammal, insect and reptile special status species. The uplands of the site retain stands of the bunch grasses, sedges and rushes of the severely declining coastal terrace prairie plant community.

Project History: In January 2002, the Coastal Conservancy awarded a \$3,000,000 grant to the City of Watsonville to acquire approximately 80 acres of grassland, riparian habitat, wetlands, and agricultural land within the City's coastal zone. The acquisition fortified an urban/rural boundary and helped secure much stronger protections for hundreds of acres of wetlands and extremely valuable farmland in the lower Pajaro Valley west of Highway 1. The acquisition was part of a locally supported solution to a land use conflict among the need for housing and schools and the protection of thousands of acres of coastal habitat and agriculture. The new Pajaro Valley High School (PVHS) is being built on the acquired land. and degraded habitat on the site is now in the process of being restored.

The California Coastal Commission approved the LCP amendment allowing construction of the PVHS sited on the uplands of West Struve Slough with the proviso that the school provides an environmental stewardship program (Exhibit 4). Consequently the PVHS has two themes: English language literacy and environmental education. Originally, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District was going to create space in the school lobby to meet the requirements of the LCP policy and SEIR mitigation measure requiring a natural sciences study center and environmental stewardship program. Local community groups and wetland advocates saw the opportunity to create a more robust center with greater opportunities for research, restoration, and education. Although the Conservancy generally does not fund mitigation projects, it has funded projects where the Conservancy's monies will provide a net enhancement of natural resources and benefits beyond the mitigation requirements. By providing a separate building that includes a laboratory, library, visitor center, greenhouse, and training spaces, the proposed project goes beyond the original expectations for meeting the mitigation requirements and will provide an enhanced experience of coastal environmental processes and opportunities to participate in restoration projects to students and visitors throughout the region, rather than only serving the PVHS students. The center will also serve as an important meeting and training location for organizations involved in watershed restoration.

Once the design concept for a separate, stand-alone building with enhanced features was accepted by the District, the project went through four phases. In 2000, the WWW, the City of Watsonville, and the District joined to collaborate on a plan for a Wetlands Educational Resource Center to be constructed on the site of the new high school. An ad hoc committee with members from the city, the school district and the WWW was formed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)(Exhibit 2). The resulting MOU was approved by the Watsonville City Council, the PVUSD Board and the WWW Board of Directors. The MOU states that the WWW will coordinate the use of the building, oversee the educational programs, and lead the fundraising for the building.

The second phase involved developing the plans and obtaining the state and local approvals for the building on the school site. The City of Watsonville approved the LCP permit to construct the WERC in October 2003. (Exhibit 5). The MOU ad hoc committee interviewed architects and developed the plans. The plans were approved by the State in 2004 and all permits are secured.

The third phase is fundraising. Local farmers and growers joined educators, biologists, and environmental groups in a highly successful kick-off fundraising event. There is wide spread local interest and enthusiasm for the WERC with 100 local donors contributing \$200,000 toward the center. The City is contributing \$150,000, leaving a shortfall of approximately \$125,000 to complete construction.

The final phase of bidding and constructing the building and designing the interiors is now underway. A committee of seven teachers and four members of the WWW worked on interior classroom design and equipping the laboratory. A committee from the WWW has consulted with appropriate community members to design the visitor center and the library. The building has been bid and construction will start in May with an expected opening date in October 2005.

PROJECT FINANCING:

The entire project, separate from the construction of the rest of the high school, is expected to cost approximately \$1,022,790. The Conservancy's contribution would be about 12% of the total cost.

<u>Committed</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Sources</u>
State Bond funds (Proposition 55)	\$500,000	
City of Watsonville	\$150,000	
Private donations	\$201,700	
Total committed funds:	\$851,700	
<u>Anticipated</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Sources</u>
Coastal Conservancy	\$125,000	
Monterey Peninsula Foundation	\$ 45,000	
Anonymous individual donors	\$ 1,090	
Total anticipated funds:	\$171,090	

Total Project Cost:

\$1,022,790

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the FY 04/05 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50). Proposition 50 authorizes the use of funds for development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources (Water Code, section 79571(b)). Eligible projects under section 79571 include both research facilities for watershed protection and conservation and nature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands and provide wildlife viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs. Funding priority is to be given to nature center projects operated by a nonprofit organization that provides educational opportunities to children from urban areas that lack access to such opportunities. *Id.*

Consistent with these requirements, the Wetland Educational Resource Center will provide facilities for research and education, focusing on wetlands, water quality, and related issues on the Santa Cruz County coast. It will provide educational opportunities for students and children from Santa Cruz County and other regional counties, particularly benefiting the underserved Latino community. This grant will enhance other grants provided to local partners in Santa Cruz County to develop wetland enhancement and riparian restoration projects in the Watsonville Slough System (see discussion of Prior Conservancy Goals, below).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This public access and education project would be undertaken pursuant to Public Resources Code, section 31119(a)(1) and Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, sections 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code.

Under section 31119(a)(1), the Conservancy may undertake individual educational projects for pupils in kindergarten to grade 12 relating to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and maintenance of coastal resources, and may award grants to nonprofit organizations for these purposes, provided funds are available for this purpose.

Under Chapter 9, the Conservancy is to have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public coastal accessways. In undertaking that role pursuant to Section 31400.01, the Conservancy may award grants to a nonprofit organization to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. In addition, Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet that objective.

The Wetlands Educational Resource Center, a facility located within the Coastal Zone on one of the last remaining California freshwater coastal wetlands, will be able to offer improved public access to the unique wetland ecosystem and provide a permanent home for the environmental stewardship program. It will fully accommodate people with disabilities. The center will offer hands-on restoration and enhancement of coastal resources by engaging students and community

members in native plant propagation and other hands-on restoration projects. It also serves to increase the public's knowledge of important resource protection needs for the ocean and shore.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, staff recommends approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy in light of the total amount available for coastal public accessways, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. The proposed authorization would leverage matching funds by providing twelve percent of the amount needed to complete the construction project.

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Watsonville Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B**, the proposed project will open public access at an important coastal wetland by providing interpretative facilities that will better serve individuals with various physical limitations. The center is designed to minimize impacts to surrounding sensitive natural resources and provide the potential for increased stewardship of these resources.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D**, the proposed project will result in increased recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by completing the construction of a regional environmental education center.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objectives A and C**, the project will help restore and enhance coastal habitats by offering programming for hands-on restoration of coastal wetlands by students and community members, including projects to eradicate non-native invasive species in the adjacent slough.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** This project is supported by the Pajaro Valley School District, the City of Watsonville, Assemblymembers John Laird and Simon Salinas, Senator Abel Maldonado, Congressman Sam Farr, Secretary of State Bruce McPherson, Santa Cruz County Supervisors Tony Campos and Ellen Pirie, Seymour Labs of Longs Marine

Sanctuary, the Watershed Institute of CSU Monterey Bay, Rich Merrill and Rob Edwards of Cabrillo College, Sam Earnshaw of California Association of Family Farmers, Janine DeWald from the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Coastal Commission, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the California Resource Conservation Corps. In addition there was been broad financial support from local farmers, educators and interested citizens.

4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Santa Cruz County.
5. **Need:** There is an awakening interest in stewardship and restoration of the Watsonville wetlands and the Pajaro watershed. Having a laboratory, a greenhouse, a centralized library for educational and research material, and coordination of these educational efforts is crucial for quality education and research of these wetlands and the surrounding watershed. Funding from the Conservancy is needed to bridge the existing gap left in the construction funds. The Conservancy's proposed grant represents about 12 % of the total cost of the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The WERC will be the only wetlands educational center on the central coast dedicated to studying and preserving freshwater wetlands which drain into the ocean, an essential part of ocean ecology. The center will serve educators, students and the general public from adjacent counties (Monterey, San Mateo, Santa Clara and San Benito), particularly students from underserved communities, many of which do not have access to the coast.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** After years of planning and fundraising, the project is entering its final construction phase, and is scheduled for completion in Fall 2005. The funding gap that remains must be closed within the next few months. By constructing the center at the same time as the implementation of the high school, the project can benefit from the security measures currently in place to protect equipment for the high school construction. If the project does not occur until after the high school center is completed, the continuation of these security measures and other mobilization costs would increase the cost of the project.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project will provide the only freshwater wetland center on the central coast, filling a crucial niche in our central coast educational programs. It will combine restoration and education to contribute to immediate restoration of degraded habitat and long term preservation and restoration projects. It will provide the educational space and coordination for all entities and agencies conducting environmental education program to the Pajaro Valley.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above. The project is highly leveraged, with approximately 88 % of the funds being provided by sources other than the Conservancy.
11. **Innovation:** The project will provide hands-on education and restoration experience to regional school districts as well as facilitating the unique environmental education and wetland restoration curriculum which is being developed at Pajaro Valley High School, where the project is located. In addition, the project will offer a visitor center and library, and provide a meeting space for environmental organizations. It will also be a training lab for the

Watsonville Wetlands Watch docent program. The grantee will be able to offer services to bring together, coordinate, and integrate environmental education programs of other state and local agencies and nonprofit groups so that they do not overlap.

12. **Readiness:** The grantee has finalized plans, obtained all necessary permits, raised funds, and put the building out to bid. Construction is scheduled to start in May 2005 and be complete by October 2005.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** This project furthers several Conservancy goals and prior involvement in protecting and restoring the Watsonville Slough System. In addition to the grant to acquire the land the high school and resource center is on (see “Project History” above), the Conservancy has also provided a grant to the County to prepare the “Watsonville Sloughs Watershed Resource and Conservation & Enhancement Plan,” as well as a grant to the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District for the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program for Santa Cruz County. This latter grant includes funding for the designs and permits for three wetland enhancement and riparian restoration projects in the Watsonville Slough System, as well as the development of a watershed activity guide for teachers in the county. The WERC will house a lending library of classroom materials that will support the use of the activity guide by teachers throughout the county, many of whom cannot afford the materials on their own. Finally, the Conservancy gave a grant to the Trust for Public Land to acquire the Buena Vista property, which is part of the slough system and an important habitat for the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.
15. **Cooperation:** This project represents a remarkable cooperative effort between local donors, private nonprofits, community farmers and growers, and state and local agencies, all of which have played active roles in the fundraising and development of the center.

Consistency with Conservancy Access Standards

The proposed Wetlands Educational Resource Center will be consistent with the Conservancy’s “Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development.” In particular, the new facility will be accessible to persons with disabilities (Standard 13) and is consistent with Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act, avoids adverse effects on the resource and enhances the resource, and has been reviewed by the Department of Fish and Game and the California Coastal Commission (Standard 5).

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

On June 14, 2000, the Coastal Commission approved the City of Watsonville’s request for an LCP amendment to allow the high school to be built west of Highway 1 in the Coastal Zone on the condition that the City adopt several modifications to the design of the high school. The modifications were intended to ensure that the high school would avoid adjacent environmentally sensitive habitats, provide buffers along environmentally sensitive habitat areas and agricultural areas, and reflect the area’s rural character in its buildings. The Commission found that the high school, as modified by the LCP amendment, would not result in significant effects for which mitigation measures had been employed. On August 22, 2000, the City adopted the modifications to the high school design. The Commission certified the LCP amendments on October 12, 2000.

The proposed Wetlands Educational Resource Center at the Pajaro Valley High School is consistent with the 2005 City of Watsonville Local Coastal Program (LCP), which encourages policies that provide greater coastal access, provide visitor-serving facilities, and protect sensitive habitat areas. Section C.5 (b)(1) of the LCP amendment, one of the required modifications to the high school, states that the public school shall include an environmental stewardship program, with an interpretive and teaching plot for students to conduct supervised environmental restoration. By expanding this requirement for a stewardship program into a multi-use environmental education facility, the center will serve as a resource for not only the Pajaro Valley High School students, but also students and community members in neighboring counties. Appreciation for freshwater coastal wetland ecosystems will be taught in addition to providing the opportunity for hands-on restoration projects.

On October 28, 2003, the City of Watsonville approved a coastal development permit for the center (Exhibit 5). The grantee and the District determined that the increased facilities would not require expansion of the project site nor would there be probable impacts from operation of the nature center.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project has undergone extensive environmental review both through CEQA and the coastal permit planning process as described above. In 1997, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District certified an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed high school. Due to a negative response from the community, the District voluntarily decertified the EIR and prepared a Revised EIR (REIR) which was certified in 1998. A lawsuit was filed opposing the REIR certification, which was dismissed, as was the appeal. After certification of the REIR, the LCP amendment and the project modifications were adopted. Although not technically required, the District prepared a Supplemental EIR (SEIR) on the new project design. (Exhibit 3, at 1-4). The District certified the SEIR on May 23, 2001, having determined that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment once all proposed mitigation measures have been implemented. *Id. at 1.*

The 1998 REIR and the 2001 SEIR for the high school found no potential for impacts on population/housing, energy/mineral resources, cultural resources, or recreation. The documents did identify the potential for impacts from the high school project on land use/agricultural land, transportation/circulation, air quality, noise, geology, hydrology, biology, public service and facilities, utilities, hazardous materials, and aesthetics/visual quality. The SEIR developed a detailed mitigation and monitoring plan to address all of the potential impacts from the high school's construction. Mitigation measure B-18 required, consistent with the LCP amendment, that the District create, implement and maintain an natural sciences study center on the site to utilize partnerships with other environmental protection agencies and associations in an effort to further community education and knowledge. (Exhibit 3, Attachment 2, p. 18). The District is required to develop and implement a Habitat Management plan and report to the school board trustees semi-annually. *Id.*

The project under consideration by the Conservancy is the Wetlands Educational Resource Center. Originally, the District was going to make space in the school lobby available to meet the

requirements of the LCP policy and SEIR mitigation measure requiring a natural sciences study center and environmental stewardship program. Local community groups and wetland advocates saw the opportunity to create a more robust center containing a laboratory, library, visitor center, greenhouse, and training spaces that will offer expanded educational and restoration opportunities to not only the on-site students, but also to students and visitors throughout the region. The proposed center will be built within the permitted building envelope of the high school and will be subject to the same conditions and mitigations required for the rest of the school.

Staff recommends the Conservancy concur with the Final SEIR prepared and adopted by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District on May 23, 2001 with respect to construction of the WERC after independent review and consideration of the project's record, the Commission's LCP amendment (Exhibit 4), the Revised Environmental Impact Report (Exhibit 3), the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (*Id.*), and the Watsonville City Council Resolution Granting LCP Permit for WERC (Exhibit 5) that the project finds that the project avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance. Staff further recommends the Conservancy find that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as designed, has the potential for significant adverse effect on the environment.

The District paid the required filing fee to the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) for its review of the draft SEIR for CEQA compliance. CDFG originally did not make any comments on the draft SEIR. The Coastal Commission required consultation with CDFG on the Biological Restoration Plan, one of the mitigation measures identified in the SEIR. The District incorporated all of the CDFG's subsequent requirements into the plan. Staff recommends the Conservancy find that there is substantial evidence based on the administrative record before the Conservancy that the project will not have a potential for adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources as defined in California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2 and 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d).

All supporting documents and the final SEIR are attached for review. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for the project.